

had stopped struggling now, was lying quietly under Pan-sat and O-dan, probably resigned to her fate. Maybe they could make her walk back to camp before killing her...no. That would be even harder than hauling two carcasses. She'd be sure to get away.

He walked over to the group and prodded Pan-sat with his toe. "Off." The two small males released the tor-o-don female, sliding away cautiously. She lay there spread-eagled, looking up at him dull-eyed, obviously stunned. Probably hit in the head a number of times. He squatted, touching her here and there, feeling her soft breasts, arms with hard, stringy muscle, felt the smooth, soft fur on her thighs and abdomen. Finally, he kneeled between her legs, inspecting her more-or-less hairless genitals. They were similar to what you saw on a waz-ho-don female under all the hair. That was true of most mammals, of course, but these were just the right size...

Om-at realized, with a sudden start, that he was erect and ready to go. One thrust...behind him, Ta-den barked with amazement. The female shrieked and lifted up, fists clenched. Pan-sat and O-dan jumped forward, grabbing her arms, holding her down, while Om-at continued to thrust. The female struggled against her captors, mewling with obvious pain, until Om-at was done.

Om-at stood beside Ta-den, watching while the others took their turns with the crying female, hefting the nice, smooth river cobble in one hand. It was an astonishing sight.

Ta-den nudged him suddenly, gesturing at the struggling group. "Sex. Guest-gift. Sex. O-lo-a!" Big, big grin.

Om-at grinned back, rubbing his fingers on the surface of the stone, waiting for Id-an to finish before cracking the female's skull.

A few days later, Om-at sat in the darkness with his back up against the warm, smooth surface of his favourite hot-stone by the cliff camp. It hadn't taken them long to get here and this new countryside, down where the valley narrowed and the river widened, was rich with small game and fresh forage. His belly was full, the night around him rustling with the sounds of sex.

Nothing, of course, to compare with the night they'd come home stuffed with male tor-o-don meat, Pan-sat's ad-yo staggering beneath the weight of the female's carcass. They'd dumped it on the ground before wide-eyed O-lo-a, then Om-at had lifted his arms high and shouted. "Guest-gift! All!" A feast-orgy had followed, lasting far into the night.

Ko-tan, memory of his own long-ago special night now eclipsed, had been sullen with rage. And Om-at's status had risen far. It wouldn't last, of course, sooner or later Ko-tan would see to it that he was put in his place. Right now, though, he was everyone's friend.

There was whimpering in the night, somewhere off under the scrubby trees by the riverbank. Pan-sat's voice. Whimpering. Om-at squinted into the darkness. Yes. There. Lu-don squatting on his twisted legs, Pan-sat bent over before him, crying softly to himself. It had started again, as people forgot that so-recent night of triumph. Ko-tan would know what this meant too.

Nearby, Id-an and O-dan sat together, watching,

obviously upset, holding each other close, anger reflected in their postures. But merely watching. What could anyone do? Lu-don was the women's darling. Not even Ko-tan was allowed to chastise him.

Om-at felt the anger bubble up inside his chest and break open. Pan-sat deserved better than this. He'd helped catch the tor-o-don female, after all.

He got to his feet, standing beside the stone for a while, aware that Id-an and O-dan were looking at him now. "Adenen-yo..." he whispered, then stooped and picked up the river cobble he'd been carrying around since the day he and Ta-den had used it on the tor-o-don male. It had come to possess some kind of magic, though not even the women could put a name to it.

Decision. He walked over to where Lu-don and Pan-sat were crouched, Lu-don whispering soft female words to himself, Pan-sat sobbing, face in the dust. Om-at barked, "Ad-en-en-yo!" and brought the rock down on the back of Lu-don's neck. Crack. He simply fell away, as if boneless, and lay still on the ground.

Pan-sat peered over his shoulder, wide-eyed, and whispered, "Om-at?"

"Up."

Commotion behind him. Om-at turned and with a sinking feeling realized people were coming out of the bushes all over camp. The entire tribe. From her place atop the pile of scree against the cliff face, O-lo-a was on her feet, descending into the camp, walking swiftly forward. And the people were gathering, Low Women coming forward, males hanging back, fearful. He could see Ko-tan, still up on the rockpile where he'd been with O-lo-a. He wouldn't come down now.

O-lo-a came and kneeled beside Lu-don, pushing at his still body, then rolling him over. "Lu-don?" Peering close, at his open, motionless eyes. "Dead Lu-don..." She looked up at Om-at then, eyes blazing, "Killed him!"

Though females' complex utterances were often hard for a male to understand, that was clear enough. Om-at felt a sudden scald of fear, the sensation that his bowels wanted to let go.

O-lo-a lashed out with her fist, aiming for his genitals. She missed, landing a hard blow against one hip bone as Om-at tried to dodge. Rage. Rage inside him. Om-at kicked at her, knocking her back on her buttocks.

Somewhere in the camp, a female voice wailed, "Hit First Woman?"

Om-at shouted, "Adenen-yo!" looking around.

Pan-sat stood there, shaking visibly. "Adenen..." he whispered, taking a hesitant step forward. Then he screamed, turned and bolted into the bushes. Another look around. Id-an and O-dan were already gone, fled. And Ta-den had been nowhere to be seen all evening. In the background, the Low Women were beginning to stamp their feet, slowly getting closer, chanting something, many words, the same ones, over and over, "...hit First Woman hit First Woman hit..."

A shadow loomed over Om-at, blocking the bright moonlight and he looked up at the broad heavy form of Pan-at-lee, shoulders dense with fat muscle, tall, strong, dangerous. And angry. He whispered, "Mama..." pleading. Like a child. Like this woman's child.

Now that collection has been extended in turn, and has been published here as **Greetings From Earth** (Picador, £14.99). Okay? Bradfield started his career in *Interzone* with fine, skewed darkly comic fabulations – the apocalyptic "The Flash! Kid," the dreamy dissolution of "The Dream of the Wolf" – that shared the metaphysical unease of sf's best fiction, but none of its tradition. He has moved on. The unease has been sharpened to a scalpel edge, and it is the unease of living at the end of the 20th century. "The world is a very big confusing place," one of his characters tells her unborn baby. "But that doesn't mean there aren't simpler places we can go... Dig down deep enough and eventually you come to this, this hard primal floor of the world, this place that existed long before history ever got here." Bradfield's fictions, informed by a dark deadpan humour, let that primal floor show through.

Lastly, a novel somehow overlooked last year. This is not too late, I hope, to draw your attention to the fact that after the fictionalized autobiography of *Climbers*, M. John Harrison has returned to his highly individual brand of metaphysical fantasy in **The Course of the Heart** (Gollancz, £14.99).

Its structure is deceptively simple. Three students perform a ritual or rite under the supervision of a seedy mentor, Yaxley. None of them can remember quite what happens, but they are pursued by the consequences throughout their lives. Yaxley is no help, slipping deeper into a perverted search for ritual power until it kills him. Two students, Lucas Medlar and Pam Stuyvesant, marry, and try to comfort themselves in a shared gnostic fantasy based on the autobiography of an invented travel writer, and his search for a mysterious country, the Coeur, which intercedes between the pain of this world and the saving grace of the Pleroma, the place of fullness or fulfilment. The third, the narrator of the story, who never names himself, is haunted by a sense of incompleteness, and finds himself in the role of mediator when Lucas's and Pam's marriage falls apart under the pressure of their individual hauntings, and Pam's various illnesses become terminal.

Like *Climbers*, *The Course of the Heart* is a celebration of quiddity, a shuffle of evocative images and detail coding the gnosis of the world; like the later Viriconium stories, it is replete with a yearning for a place more real than the world, restless, crammed with insights into the impulse towards fantasy and the extraordinary power of nostalgia for those mysterious countries (like our memories of childhood) that never were yet should have been. It is a fiction whose arc is not closure, but release.

(Paul J. McAuley)

Grow Old, Not Up Wendy Bradley

What Townshend meant to say in "My Generation," of course, is "hope I die before I grow up": getting old is just chronology, nothing to be done. Growing up, however, is a state of mind that can be avoided if one sets one's face firmly against it.

Borderland edited by Terri Windling and Mark Alan Arnold (Tor, \$4.99) is a book of longish short stories set in the fabulous shared world where enchantment is back, where there are cool elves with mirrorshades and where human rock-and-rollers can work magic with a gibbon. My problem with the Borderland world is that all the people who run away to this neutral territory where both magic and technology work intermittently are so damned young. Not every dreamer is seventeen – where are the thirtysomethings? Give me a map of the Borderland and I'll be on the first train, but an unrestricted diet of the books would have you believe the whole world is inhabited by adolescents.

Nevertheless this is a very engaging collection. Two of the four stories stand out: Steven R. Boyett's "Prodigy" is a pleasing tale of a rock-and-roll hero/wastrel whose girlfriend wants him to, no really, get a job; and when she leaves him he creates a monster of longing out of the sound of his axe on the border and has to play calm, non-testosterone accoustic to save her. Then Ellen Kushner, the author of the definitive book of *Thomas the Rhymer*, produces a perfect story on that theme, written from the viewpoint of the human daughter of Borderland aristocracy, revealing how she is fooled by the glamour of the elven queen.

I was a tad less taken with **Elsewhere** by Will Shetterly, a Borderlands novel (also published by Tor, \$3.99). This is where it starts to get a little tedious, since the disaffected teenage-viewpoint character goes through all that teen angst – missing/dead siblings, ignoring those who love him in favour of lustling after those who don't, adopted by an armless (literally) bookshop owner and finding, and they actually mean it, the lost heir of faerie. But it's a book on the road to nowhere because the kind of change-the-world resolution the "kid learns how life works" plot demands can't take place when the world doesn't belong to the writer, where there can be no structural alterations to a common habitat. On the whole the Borderland is a des. res. if only someone would move in.

P.M. Griffin has moved in on an Andre Norton habitat in **Redline the Stars** (Tor, \$19.95) which is credited to both but appears to have been written

by Griffin with "permission... comments, suggestions and encouragement" from Norton. This reads as though it seeks an even younger readership than the Borderland novels although that may simply be a function of its, well, "innocence" is the word that comes to mind. The Solar Queen is a trader spaceship which has been the subject of Norton's "bestselling space opera series" and its crew this time contains a political correction in the person of its first female member, Rael Cofort. The problem with this kind of tokenism has been pointed out before (see, for example, Gwyneth Jones' piece on writing science fiction for teenagers in Lucie Armitt's *Where No Man Has Gone Before*, Routledge). In the kind of juvenile space opera we all read secretly in our teens we all identified with the hero. Stick a token girly into an all-male crew, though, and we have to deal with whether we identify with her or stick with the boys. Griffin doesn't help us by making Rael Cofort enigmatic, empathic and probably telepathic too, by giving her in fact all the supposedly womanly virtues as well as a bit of a flingette with the manly captain. Personally I'd recommend readers in the target age group to move straight from Heinlein to Joanna Russ and Lois McMaster Bujold.

Yes, and now it's Smug Bitch time. In October 1990, reviewing volume one of Weis and Hickman's "Death Gate Cycle," *Dragon Wing*, I doubted the demise of the only decent character, Hugh the Hand, who died in the last chapter:

"Or at least I think he does. He has already been resurrected once in the course of the volume. Even death must give way the exigencies of the Weis and Hickman plotting machine."

So here we are in volume five and, yes, Hugh is back from the dead. Where has he been for the last three volumes? Oh, in storage – he locked himself into a cell in a monastery and drank himself into a stupor from which he recovers in nothing flat when his presence is required.

You still want to know what happens? Well OK, the dwarf characters from volume one are still in the middle of their revolution against the oppressive elves, and Haplo is having a good old angst attack on discovering that he and his kind aren't gods after all, and there are some chaos dragons that live off fear and panic and have as god-like a relationship to Haplo as he has to the elves, dwarves and humans, and really I couldn't give a hoot. If it weren't for seriesism I'd stop right now but I need to know what happens next which is I guess why, however cardboard the characters and creaking the construc-